

says..." The rubrics give these clear directions throughout the Mass.

GOING TOWARD THE EAST

Then-Cardinal Ratzinger stated that although we may not be physically able to face the east, our common direction during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass becomes our "liturgical East." Where this turning to the east is not possible, as in St. Peter's Basilica, a crucifix should be placed on the altar so that both the priest and the community can focus on Christ and not on one another.

Change begins with our attitude. During the Mass, our focus is not on the priest, but on Jesus Christ, the true center of our liturgical gathering. Seeing the priest during the Eucharistic Prayer is not essential. In many of the Eastern Rites, during the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest stands behind the closed doors of an icon screen or iconostasis.

This ancient and apostolic orientation helps us to experience the transcendence of the Sacred Liturgy and remind us that priest and people together go toward the Lord who comes to us.

By responding to the liturgical vision of Pope Benedict XVI, may we all enter into the true spirit of the Liturgy and into the genuine "active participation" called for by the fathers of Vatican II.

A RESPONSE

A visitor to my parish sent me the following note:

"I wanted to also share with you my experience attending Mass at your parish. I had never participated in a Mass *ad orientem*, and I am still reflecting on how much different it is than what we have now. I would not have believed if someone told me that Mass would be much more prayerful - totally focused on God rather than on the actions of the priest.

It's as if when not facing the priest, you can actually visualize your prayers being offered to God through the priest to Heaven. Everything becomes more prioritized or aligned - the congregation, the priest, Christ on the cross, to Heaven. It is difficult to put it all in words"



SUGGESTED READING

"The Spirit of The Liturgy" by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) specifically Pg. 74-84.

"Turning Towards The Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer" by U. M. Lang, forwarded by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

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AD ORIENTEM

TOWARD THE EAST

BY FATHER JAY A. FINELLI



CHANGE COMES

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), rapid change came to the Church in many areas, especially in her Liturgical life. For virtually 400 years, the Mass remained unchanged, except in very minute areas. However, when Pope Paul VI promulgated the new order of the Mass in 1970, many people took liberties never intended or imagined by the Council's document on the

“I will go in unto the Altar of God.” Psalm 43:4

Sacred Liturgy, nor by the Holy Father. Liturgists and priests were taken up with the excitement of the day and used the Mass as a form of self-expression and creativity. The Church’s official worship became a kind of spiritual petri dish accompanied by grave consequences.

UNINTENDED CHANGES

With the promulgation of the new Missal, there was an almost universal change. High altars were literally destroyed, being replaced with altar tables, and priests began facing the people for the entire Mass. This was something that Vatican II never intended, nor was this innovation ever even talked about. The Council at no time ordered or even suggested the destruction of high altars. The cause of this misunderstanding began with a mistranslation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. A correct translation would be: “The main altar should be built separated from the wall, which is useful wherever it is possible, so that it can be easily walked around and a celebration toward the people can be carried out” (translation from Fr. John Zuhlsdorf). The desire was that the priest could easily incense the all the way around the altar, and if needed, Mass could be celebrated facing the people.

TRADITION SPEAKS

“Despite all the variations in practice that have taken place far into the second millennium, one thing has remained clear for the whole of Christendom: praying toward the East is a tradition that goes back to the beginning” (Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pg. 75).

For virtually 1950 years, Mass was celebrated with the people and the priest facing the same direction. Churches were built with the nave and

altar facing East for many centuries. It wasn’t until later that churches were built facing other directions, but this was mainly due to the fact that church property did not allow for eastern facing churches. Although the Roman Rite has allowed and almost universally Mass is said facing the congregation, the Eastern Rites and the Orthodox Churches continue to face East for the celebration of the Liturgy. “Judaism and Islam, now as in the past, take it for granted that we should pray toward the central place of revelation, to the God who has revealed himself to us, in the manner and in the place in which he revealed himself” (*SoL*, pg. 75).

DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

Many people, including some bishops and priests, say it doesn’t really matter. However, forty years of Mass celebrated facing the people has had adverse effects. Pope Benedict XVI stated: “The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself” (*SoL*, pg. 80).

The Liturgy is not about us! The Mass is the Sacrifice of Christ, offered by the priest who acts in the person of Christ on our behalf. The people of God participate in this offering, to a different degree and in a differing role. At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest, facing the people, says: “Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours becomes acceptable to God the Father Almighty.” All of the baptized, united with the priest, offer their own sacrifice, their sufferings, pains, difficulties, indeed their very lives to God, that He may transform them, enabling them to become “holy as our Father in heaven is holy.” In many places the Mass has become a time for entertainment. The priest concocts some new innovation each week to keep

the congregation’s attention. It has become as if the Mass were primarily a ritual of self-affirmation rather than the Sacrifice of Christ made present to us.

GOING TOWARD THE EAST

The natural solution to this “community-centered” focus is to once again “turn to the Lord who is coming to us.” Although our altars and churches may not all face geographical East, our common focus is known as the liturgical “East.” “For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem, so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together ‘toward the Lord’” (*SoL*, pg. 80).

We may not face true East, yet, “On the other hand, a common turning to the east during the Eucharist Prayer remains essential. This is not a case of something accidental, but of what is essential. Looking at the priest has no importance. What matters is looking together at the Lord” (*SoL*, pg. 81).

THE ROMAN MISSAL

The Roman Missal revised and published by authority of Pope Paul VI in 1970 and its most recent edition, that of 2002, presume that the priest and congregation face each other for the the Liturgy of the Word, but face the same direction, towards the Lord, for the Offertory prayers and Eucharistic Prayer.

The rubrics, that is, the directions the priest follows when celebrating the Eucharist, direct him when to face the altar and when to face the people.

At the prayer over the gifts, it reads: “The Priest, standing at the altar...” However, before the priest says, “Pray, brethren...”, the rubric states: “Standing at the middle of the altar, facing the people, extending and then joining his hands, he